

1993

# Spectrum, 1993

Spectrum Contributors  
*Northwestern College, Iowa*

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S P E C T R U M

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NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE  
1993



LAURA APOL OBBINK, a doctoral candidate in English education at the University of Iowa, evaluated the entries and designated awards to those she felt deserved special recognition.

"In some cases, the pieces that I selected for awards may not have been the most polished or technically correct, but in all cases, these were the pieces that seemed to me to reach the farthest—to contain some vision, some insight worth sharing or some connection worth articulating."

Scott Isebrand's "His Private Concert" was awarded first place for poetry. Obbink commented on his use of recurring images, phrases and words that "make the poem tightly focused...The image of the shells slamming out of tempo against a requiem seemed to be particularly fine."

"Lazarus" by Joy Sterner took second place. "Much as the authors' fingers roam to fall on just the right cup, I see the author's language roaming to find just the right expression for the moment contained in the poem—a moment that could have passed into the ordinary, but didn't."

Amy Fichter and Maya Gravatt both received third place for poetry. Obbink commented on the visual details in "Complement"—the ponytail, the glasses, the thermos of Folgers rather than just coffee. "This struck me as an evocative piece. It's deceptively simple, but what is does it does extremely well."

In "A Remnant," Obbink noted that "The fragments strung together in this poem are quite effective in capturing the speaker's sense of disappointment...The poem's sense of understatement works quite nicely; what's unsaid speaks as loudly as what's said."

Elizabeth De Jong and Scott Isebrand were awarded with first and second place, respectively, in the prose category. Obbink commented on the "extended metaphor that was central to the piece—that drawing is like feet" in "Hands Behind My Back," and the details that make it easy for the person to visualize the reader being described in "A Praying Berkeley Grad."

The award for Best Collection of Works went to Joy Sterner. "I found this collection of poetry outstanding both in content and style. Each poem in this collection gives evidence of a fine ear and a perceptive eye...There's a resonance that remains after the last lines are read, and I found myself thinking of these pieces often—even when they weren't in front of me."

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## His Private Concert

(On seeing a photograph of cellist Vedran Smalovic playing in Hero's Cemetery, Sarajevo, in the August 17, 1992 issue of Newsweek.)

*I played for him  
Wavering notes, drawn up from a weeping mind,  
Played amongst this dirty maze of yellow-brown mounds  
Topped pell-mell with tulips and wooden planks  
For tombstones.*

*His name and a Bosnian crest I played for;  
His name, his life, his strength struck down  
Into a lifeless heap by the same Serbian shells  
I still hear striking the ground around this silent  
Community of heroes—*

*The same whistling shells that slammed  
Discordantly against my requiem, off tempo against  
My playing of his private requiem, and still strike our besieged Soil and  
Splatter it onto my tuxedo, worn for him,  
And my weary cello.*

*I plead to God I won't play here tomorrow—  
Waking to run Sarajevo's streets with this cello,  
Dodging sniper fire and timing between barrages my next  
Tuxedoed sprint to take me closer to this sad  
Sod concert hall.*

*I pray I won't play the requiem here again.*

Scott Isebrand







## Complement

This painter man  
With a ponytail and  
Black-rimmed glasses  
Suspended from his neck  
on a cord  
called me curious.

He called me curious!  
His thermos full of  
Folgers with milk  
Must have awakened him  
Enough to notice  
The way my brush  
Searched for just the right yellow  
To complement the violet  
Already on my canvas.

Amy Fichter

## A Remnant

the old mail bag.  
I found it. crammed in the attic corner—musty.  
smelling of bat refuse and the dust of years—  
it bears your scent.  
you must have carried it full of mail—I heard you  
worked at the town post office for a few weeks.  
part-time and temporary. . . it was all that way. . .  
gardener. janitor. mailman. father.

Maya Gravatt



# Hands Behind My Back

Elizabeth DeJong

**P**aint. Thick, wet, intense paint, shining on a canvas in an expressive, curvy line—my way of communicating. It comes from my gut—my heart—through the brush in my hand onto a surface for all to see. When I try to explain my art with words I usually say, "I am most comfortable with the diagonal, expressive line, intense colors, and a direct, upfront depiction of the human form." If I were pressed, I would have to admit that I still have some technical problems to work out. I can't draw feet.

Writing for me is like drawing and redrawing feet. Sometimes I think I'm getting better, but someone always comes along and says "those toes look like hot dogs." Now if writing was like drawing a face, I'd have no problem with following the advice. But feet, feet are a necessary evil.

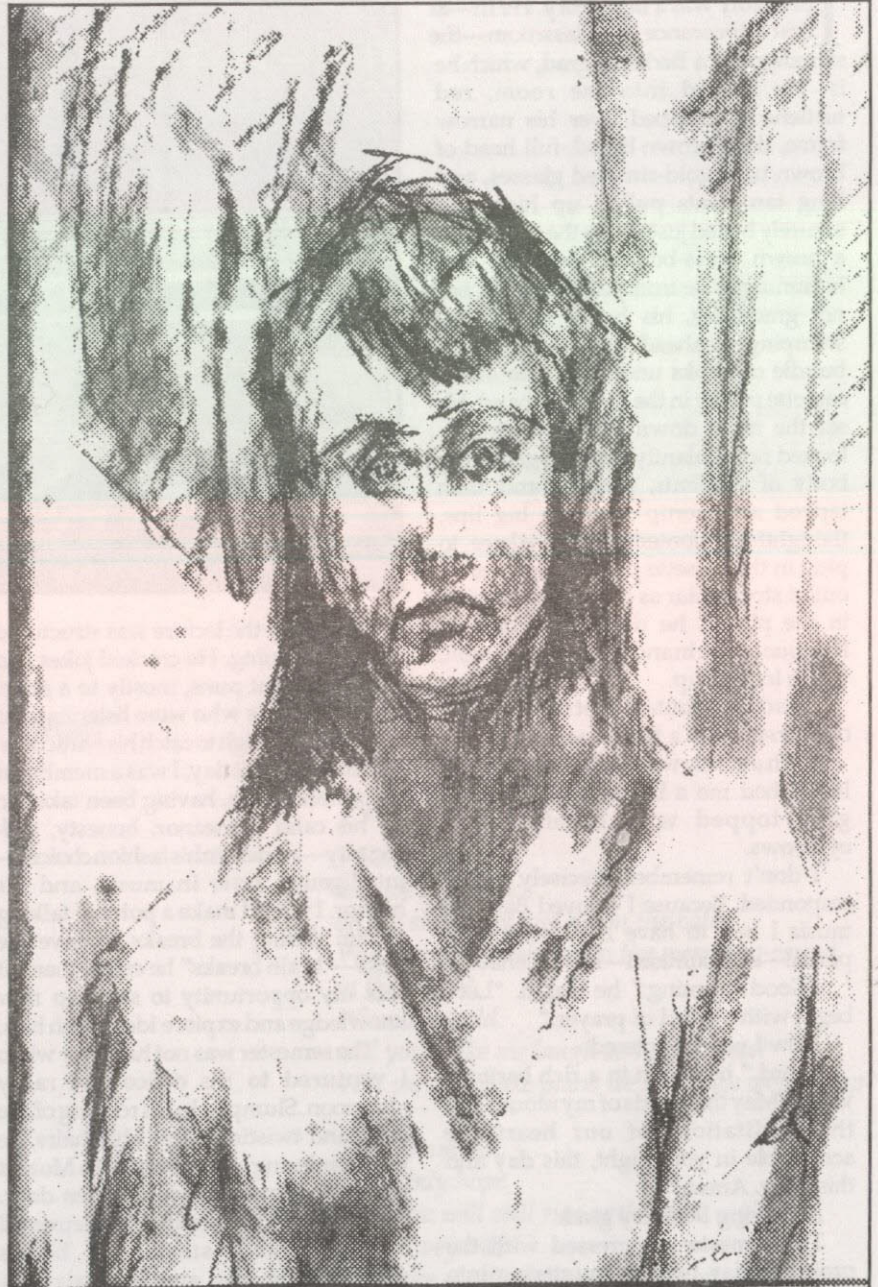
I do know that if I want to succeed in life, I have to learn feet. And writing.

I've avoided both for a long time. You can see it in my childhood drawings. All I ever drew were women in long gowns with their hands behind their backs—I couldn't draw hands either. Now that I think about it, limbs in general have bothered me. However, when I began college, I decided to master limbs—and those dreaded phalanges. Soon I began to like hands, because they could portray power and emotion. But feet, what can feet portray?

It's the same thing with writing. All my papers, from third grade book reports to history papers, have that written-the-night-before quality to them. But letters to my friends, mostly to my boyfriends, became a tool. They portrayed powerful emotions, and I worked on making them better because they served my purposes. However papers—papers in my mind seem contrived. I'm telling stuff to a professor whom I know knows a lot more than I do about something he's probably an expert in. And after fifty-some papers, I have found that what I learn is more important than what I actually write, and most professors on this campus accept my efforts. I can squeak by.

But who wants to squeak by? Especially when I know that feet can be made beautiful? If I have to do them—and I know I do—I should do them well.

However, when I have several papers due in the very near future, I have to put on a long dress and hide my hands behind my back.





# A Praying Berkeley Grad

Scott Isebrand

I probably was a little leery. He fit—at first appearance in a classroom—the stereotype of a Berkeley grad, which he is. He lanked into the room, red turtleneck wrapped over his narrow frame, dark brown beard, full head of brown hair, gold-rimmed glasses, and long tan pants pulled up high and securely belted just above the waist with a brown brass-buckled belt. He was humming as he tromped in calmly, but not gracefully, his heavy shoed feet stomping out ahead of him. He carried a bundle of books under his arm and a cassette player in the opposite hand. He set the mess down on the desk top, looked nonchalantly over the gathering body of students, pressed and then tapped a fingertip over his big lips, thoughtfully contemplating where to plug in the cassette player. The nearest outlet struck him as suitable. Plugging in the player, he dropped a tape of Baroque music in and hit the play button.

He looked up.

I made eye contact. Not deliberately, of course; I was a freshman.

With a subtle wave of his hairy hand, he flashed me a beaming big-toothed grin, topped with highly raised eyebrows.

I don't remember precisely how I responded. Because I enjoyed Baroque music I had to have been somewhat partial—even amused—by his behavior.

"Good morning," he began. "Let's begin with a word of prayer."

Now I was impressed.

"Lord," he began in a rich baritone voice, "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, this day and this hour. Amen."

A praying Berkeley grad.

The semester progressed with the professor day by day sauntering into class, putting down his bundle of books, opening with prayer, often wearing the same outfit for up to a week at a time. He had three main outfits—the classic red turtleneck and brown pants, the short-sleeved dress shirt with a patterned knit tie—both of earth-tones. And a third outfit he acquired during a break: lengthy dark brown dress pants and a mustard-yellow turtle neck. Sometimes a brown, tan, and blue patterned (i.e. non-descript) sweater complemented an outfit. The big belt was pretty much ever-present, as were the heavy burgundy shoes.



Every day the lecture was structured and entertaining. He cracked jokes and made frequent puns, mostly to a select few in the class who were listening and intelligent enough to catch his witticisms.

From the first day, I was a member of that select group, having been taken in by his calm demeanor, honesty, self-security—evident in his fashion choices—intelligence, taste in music, and his humor. I would make a point of talking to him during the breaks he gave the class—"brain breaks" he called them. It was my opportunity to soak up new knowledge and explore ideas with him.

The semester was not half over when I ventured to his office one rainy afternoon. Slumped in his rocking office chair and twisting a few chin hairs, he was pondering to the chords of a Mozart concerto. I knocked on his open door. When he invited me in, I maneuvered around small stacks of books surrounding the empty chair like Stonehenge in miniature.

We exchanged greetings. As an ice-breaker I asked some question about an assignment. Then I pressed him on the subject of Reformed theology, picking up a conversation that we had started during a recent brain break.

"Well," he began with a sigh, "prayer has always been an important aspect of my Christian journey. Also, silent meditation. Something I picked up from my Mennonite brothers."

As he talked, he wiggled loosely jointedly. He talked with deliberance,

choosing his words carefully, but I could not help being distracted by his rhythmically jerking leg, his incessant twisting of his mustache, his slightly swaying torso, and his overly-emphatic nodding. He never stopped moving—as if this body-flopping fuelled his thinking.

We discussed prayer for awhile. At one point he stooped out of his chair and grabbed a prayer book from his bookshelves. He flipped through it as we talked; then he laid it down on his desk. The conversation moved to sacred music, and then to the relationship of Christianity and the arts. After standing to leave, I shared the yarn of my spiritual journey as I took three slow steps to his door. I told him of the worldview of the conservative denomination I grew up in—that it had no room for Christian historians, or Mennonites, or prayers like he prayed, or his kind of quiet, reverent, mystical piety. I told him I was sick of that worldview.

That was the point—what I had wanted to say since I entered his room. Next, I wished I could have said, "Dr. Anderson, show me how to be humble and Godly like yourself." But that was too straight-forward, too uncomfortable. He nodded silently, his lips pushed out while he contemplated.

Finally, I said good-bye.

He scooted himself up to his desk and prepared to type; then he grabbed the prayer book next to him and handed it to me as I left. "Here, why don't you borrow this," he uttered with an almost sly smile.



## Prenuptial Queries

Do you lift your face to greet the harsh  
November wind, and endure the fragments of ice,  
burning into unprotected skin,  
or lower  
your head to avoid that tingling  
on your cheeks?

And when spring winds  
storm against your huddled figure,  
do you lean into it, or resist change,  
snapping in the gale?

And after summer heat blazes,  
searing our faces, backs,  
hands into layers of seasoned  
wrinkles, will you desire to  
incline your body toward mine?

I ask:  
after the seasons have passed,  
will you long for me  
still,  
or stare hungrily  
over my shoulder?

Joy Sterner

## When I am Old

When I am old  
will we still dance  
on the sidewalks and down the halls?  
Will you still push me on the merry-go-round  
in the snow?  
When I am old  
will you make me laugh as I chase you?  
Will we still make plans we know we won't keep?

When I am old,  
I certainly hope  
That you will still run with me at night  
in a graveyard,  
and burn candles as we contemplate the world.

When I am old,  
Do not sit by my side,  
counting my wrinkles and fixing me soup,  
measuring my last minutes.  
Rather, touch me on the arm,  
and with a playful giggle say,  
"Tag, you're it."

David J. Gibbs



## If Love

is like a rose I'd rather have a  
dandelion  
after  
the season of  
battered yellows  
and capricious greens.

When they've emerged into  
capfuls  
of delicious fluff, ready  
for tickling noses of adults  
who have yet  
to abandon  
juvenile dreams.

Puffing cheeks and  
squeezing eyes into  
slits we grasp on to  
freshly snapped stems  
and blow;  
open eyes to behold a  
vision of scattered  
inclinations.

Oh how we  
hold  
on and oh  
how we hold on  
and  
hope.

Joy Sterner

## WANTED: A WILLING WOMAN

Have I the right yet to lust a lady?  
I'm not qualified yet, it seems they say.  
But the pressures to lust! They'll say i'm gay,  
And the good flowers picked already  
When i'm prepared to maneuver, get looks.  
It seems a bloodless war between egos.  
Armies prep to counter the strengths of foes:  
Build biceps, write poetry, read sex books  
(Seduction instruction guides), or GQ  
As a "men only" self-proclaimed how-to.  
Does this help our race in propagating?  
I quit—can't compete with contemplating,  
Flexing, fashionably loose, flirting MEN.

WANTED: Love for a half-man, slow, tight, thin.

Scott Isebrand



# The Joint

R. Eva Oakhill

## Lying Together

How often  
we long to  
lie together  
at the end  
of the week...  
we think.  
Conditioned,  
like dogs,  
we commence  
drooling  
Thursday night.

Finally,  
Friday.  
We are here.  
Lying together.  
We begin  
Slowly,  
Lips pressed.

Our hands  
begin  
to wander

Down,

Further,

again

up

back

And

We began knowing  
it would have to stop.  
How often we think we long.

R. Eva Oakhill

## love poem...

I wanted to write you a love poem  
as sweet as the apples from our tree  
that we picked and bit into  
and tossed at the worn-out garage roof  
Listening as they Hit rolled down hard  
hesitated and then dropped softly into overgrown grasses  
The apples we piled into bucket and basket  
knowing after eating all we could  
we'd still have apples  
to take back with us on the long drive home  
and share with the others  
who can only half-taste their sweetness

Maya Gravatt



## *The Congenital Emigrant*

My parents were emigrants  
To New Lands,  
As were their parents  
And theirs before.  
In few places have there been more  
Than two generations:  
Tossed across the waves of the  
Mediterranean,  
Through the French port of  
Montpelier,  
Up to the English squalor of  
Industrial London,  
Beyond the Lady in  
The Harbor,  
And temporarily to ship yards of  
San Francisco.  
My blood is a virile mix  
Which runs through my veins  
Like a chartered ship.

My parents were carriers of  
The unsettled spirit,  
Manifested in me.  
I will cross the blue barrier between  
What I know to be my Birthplace  
And what I feel to be my Home—  
For they are not the same—  
And I will marry to begin a  
New lot of blood:  
My children may be white as ice,  
But theirs may be black as tarmac.

After I live my life to be what I think it  
Should,  
After I prove myself in my new home,  
As my parents did in theirs,  
And after I release my children into their  
Own World,  
Where will their lives take them?  
Will they be as restless with their  
Motherland  
As their Mother was?

R. Eva Oakhill



# The Joint

R. Eva Oakhill

My hair was down to my thighs. I was wearing red striped Levi's, white hang tens, a baha shirt, and I was cool. I was nine. My 22-year-old brother was dressed a little more conservatively, but not much: he wore blue Levi's and red hang-tens, and a vulgar pink and maroon flowered shirt he bought in the city and, for some reason, one that he wore quite often.

Our trips to Woodstock were the few times my brother and I spent alone together. Since he is thirteen years older, it is difficult for us to find common ground, but Woodstock was what we had between just us. On Saturdays, when he didn't have to work, we would rev up his overhauled Plymouth Dart and follow the road through the Catskills to Woodstock.

We went most often during the summer of 1979. I don't know how he felt about taking his nine-year-old kid sister around Woodstock, but then again, anything was acceptable in that open-minded but very secluded artist's colony.

Whenever my brother and I visited, it seemed as though we passed into another time. Hippies who had outlived their heyday wandered the sidewalks overgrown with grass. A middle-aged man with dread locks, tie-dyed shirt, and striped pants stumbled through the commons, a guitar slung over his shoulder and with what I thought was a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. He muttered something to me about a pot, but I couldn't understand. My brother chuckled and commented back.

"How did you know what he said?" I asked. "I didn't think he was speaking English."

My brother only smiled at me and remained silent.

We wandered the town with all its odd shops filled with psychedelic posters and brightly colored, spiral print clothing. We went to a shop that only sold crystals for people to worship. Another sold nothing unless it had rainbows on it—even

shoes. Yet another shop sold clothes worn by people at the famous Woodstock concert ten years earlier, but not necessarily clothing worn by the singers. Some of the clothes were picked up off the field after the concert. They were all in the sixties style. All I could imagine were the people who wore them: stoned, drunk, over-sexed, under-nourished, muddy, wet, music fanatics. The only thing I could think of to say about that was "Hey man, that's gross."

As my brother and I passed the time looking at the groovy stuff, the hippie man staggered by us again, slurring his words even more. I stopped and said, "Speak up, man! I can't understand you." He wavered a bit and turned to look at me with a mean dark scowl. A shiver of fear ran through me as he stood there looking through me. Although his face told me he was annoyed, his eyes remained expressionless—the tired, wrinkled, seen-it-all eyes were completely gazed, and all I could do was gaze back.

My brother jerked me forward.

"What's wrong with him?" I asked.

"He's on something," replied my brother.

I thought a minute and profoundly stated, "Well of course he's on something. He's on the grass."

"Exactly," he said.





## *Lady Macbeth*

*It's caught in  
every crease in  
my knuckles  
and underneath  
each of ten nails;  
except my blood  
is green and  
the turpentine  
isn't working today.*

Amy Fichter

## *life's questions*

*I remember our fourteen stairs  
and how I counted them  
everytime I climbed them,  
and how I counted them  
everytime I raced down again.  
inwardly rejoicing  
that there were always fourteen,  
yet always wondering if  
the landing  
should be considered a step.*

Maya Gravatt

## *The Twins*

*The corner piece  
of chocolate cake  
almost divided.*

*Go ahead, you cut.  
I'll choose.*

*No.*

*You choose and  
I'll cut.*

*Stop your arguing.  
My arguing.*

*Divided. Cut. Chosen.  
Her piece is bigger.*

*Take my frosting, too.  
It tastes like  
Colored Crisco to me.*

Amy Fichter

## *Journal Keeper*

*Why are all the books  
in the book store  
with blank pages  
for your thoughts  
flower-covered?*

*And what do you have  
to bury in  
the garden of your words?*

Amy Fichter



## Invitation

*She sits a silent hunter  
in snares of soft spun thread  
with drops of dew like diamonds  
around her loathsome bed.*

*Her web, an invitation  
of quaint cordiality,  
a delicate creation  
of exact locality.*

*She scarce need shift away  
from her inauspicious pose  
and rests in tranquil silence  
and confident repose.*

*She waits for faint attendance  
of unacquainted prey  
to pause to sip the nectar  
of her concealed discourtesy.*

*And for her patient hunting  
a feast will she ensnare—  
a subtle, dark assassin  
her weapon borne on air.*

Carla Hibma



## Censer

Prayers are taken in the smoke travelling  
Upwards—seen by God a searching serpent  
Skimming toward the Chair to repent;  
Swirling 'round the gilded leg, unfurling,  
Bowing, twisting, flailing;  
then cowering  
At His hot hand, His red anger-arm pent  
Up—prepared to cast the coil back-bent  
Down to tainted souls and Creation rent.

Then a Voice from the shadows of the Throne  
Room cries, "Wait, they are the groans of Your Own!"  
And a bold man swift-fingers the smoke-snake:  
Hiss to sweet music; filth to glory make—  
And the Spirit whispers to saints back down,  
"The Intercessor has seen to your Crown."

Scott Isebrand

## Pining for Faeries

Lately I am pining  
For forests and kingdoms shining.  
It seems the days have danced away  
When I with mind could sing and play  
In elfric climes and castles lined  
With gold. Reason rules now my mind.  
Crushed dreams lie 'neath feet of logic.  
No more can I indulge in magic.  
Lately I am missing  
The goblin wars and kissing  
Furry dragons on the cheek.  
If only I could grasp again  
Faerie-finding and be their kin.

Reason rules now my mind.  
Crushed dreams lie 'neath feet of logic.  
No more can I indulge in magic.

So, lately I am missing  
The goblin wars and kissing  
Furry dragons on the cheek.  
If only I could grasp again  
Faerie-finding and be their kin.

Scott Isebrand



# Needles

R. Eva Oakhill

The skinny point plunges deep into my thigh. I close my eyes and breath deeply. I can feel the evil doctor's shaky hand upset the needle as she injects the serum. The sharp pain that is all too familiar to me overcomes my leg as the sensation shoots from that tiny point. Finally, she pulls it out with one swift motion.

I have allergies. Many allergies. From food to wheat pollen to animals to corn husk secretions. My food intake must be closely monitored and running naked through corn fields is strictly forbidden.

The testing for allergies is a feat in itself. I received 94 injections in my arms in two hours from a woman who looked like she might have had one too many needles herself. I felt for sure I was allergic to them. But no. Needles were to become a part of my life for a long time.

Three years ago, I went to the doctor's office to be taught how to inject myself. She explained to me how simple it is to "pierce your own skin. In fact," she told me with a stupid smile, "sooner than you know, it will be part of your life and you'll do it without thinking. You may actually enjoy it." From that time on, I saw her for the demented woman she truly was, on a quest to make my life miserable.

We went through the learning process a little faster than we should have. Perhaps it was to confuse me. "Stick the needle in the bottle and force air into it," she told me.

The more air bubbles the better, I

suppose.

"Then draw out the serum into the syringe. Never mind those tiny air bubbles. It's only a myth that they can hurt you."

No way, lady. Every one of those bubbles is coming out.

"Now grab some fat on the side of your thigh and pinch it..."

To intensify the pain, of course.

"...and plunge the needle into the area."

I couldn't do it. She showed me another way.

"Simply hold the needle to your skin and push firmly."

This way, I can actually feel the needle break through every single layer of skin.

"Now pull back on the plunger to make sure no blood flows back into it and push the plunger in rapidly."

I could feel the witch's brew shoot into my leg and burn through the inner tissue.

"Now pull the needle out quickly and rub the area with this alcohol pad. You have to spread the serum around in the leg for it to be completely effective."

Now, years later, I do this insane ritual in the privacy and safety of my own home. But when I go to the fridge to get the serum I am reminded of the evil woman and I know that when I visit her again, the witch doctor will have more tests...and another torture for me to perform on myself.

Maybe if I drench her in water, she will melt away.



## Climb

Silhouetted against afternoon skies  
a rock climber painted  
with the dust of the  
mountain he clings to splices  
his hand into  
a crack between slabs of granite.

His fingernails dig  
into sand and leave  
blood. His neck and forearms  
are blistered—the sun burns,  
even in the shadow of a mountain.

Raw feet and leather boots have meshed  
he kicks into a fissure  
and he scrambles up, applying  
weight in too hasty a  
gesture, he slips  
scrapes a knee. His hands are jerked  
down and away, following  
the plummeting body past  
branches dry brush  
spiked rock.  
rushing.

His back cracks sharply, arms  
flipped back, head  
in whiplash—  
the rope ends.  
swings suspended, knocking  
into the stone wall.

For a moment he hangs limp  
rope-burned hands and scraped  
knuckles throb. He inhales  
deep, lets the inside  
catch up with the fall.

He hits away a shag  
of hair and stares,  
his eyes piercing cut  
the line between the sky and the  
summit.

Inflamed, fraying tendons close  
the hand, pus and puffy  
around the rope's digging  
fibers. Iron  
arms heft the body  
once more, those eyes pulling  
with their stare—  
one foot,  
another.

In the shadow of the mountain.

Kevin James Bullis

## Unplanned reflection today

as I shovelled through  
stubborn snow. My will

winning, I thought of my  
father. Heard to myself

voices proclaiming that son  
becoming more like him,

everyday. I gaze into my eyes  
at my jaw, my father's

jaw. Set, a determined gaze  
reflects that man. I scoop deeper

dig with my legs, and heave  
up with a grunt

and a wrench. Out  
back, then I turn around  
the corner  
up the sidewalk.

Kevin James Bullis



## Glasses

*Her glasses*

*Lie on an open copy of Shakespeare's Complete Works  
In the midst of scattered photographs, play bills,  
And small antiques  
Masquerading as her.  
While somewhere else,  
The ashen remains  
Of her cancer eroded body  
Pretend, too, to be her.*

*But her glasses come the closest.  
Those metal framed glass lenses  
Cold,  
Collapsed,  
Still.*

*Once they were an indication of her intellect  
And a promise of her insight:  
After approving regard  
Of cultural richness,  
She envisioned greatness  
In even the small  
And grieved potentials lost.  
We glimpsed ourselves  
In her auburn eyes  
And saw a reflection of value,  
Significance,  
Meaning.  
Much as she must have seen  
When she looked in ours.*

*Maybe if she were here  
She could show us why  
The beginning of her death, this cancer,  
Began in her optic nerve,  
As if it knew  
Her life's wellspring  
Was in her eyes.*

Amy McClintock





## Grandpa's Hands

Jill Haarsma

I remember his hands. They were coarse sturdy hands, farmer's hands, whitened and wrinkled with age. The skin covering his hands seemed to be peppered with red spots—maybe they were faded and work-worn freckles. His fingers were thick white cylinders that stretched into flat, square fingernails with clear, white tipped ends. The fibers in his nails were so coarse they looked as though someone had carved them there. In between the white calloused wrinkles wrapping around his fingers, pink skin shone through—suggesting his lost days of youth. The palms of his hands were calloused and inflexible. The clear, lusterless skin had mounded up in piles where tools had rubbed all his life.

I remember his hands reaching to the top of my grandparents' old yellow Amana refrigerator. (He was short—he always had to reach for things.) This time, like every other Sunday morning at my grandparents' house, he was reaching for the sacred jar of Sunday candy. His hands found the prize, and a blue mason jar full of powdery pink and white peppermints appeared before my wide, expectant eyes. His dwarfish, bristly-white moustache lifted up with his smile as his hands unscrewed the jar's lid. His fingers leisurely dug inside,

the slowness taunting me and stretching my patience to the limit. His thick, calloused hands, hardly able to clasp such a tiny object as a peppermint, met my small, smooth, grasping hands.

I remember him coming in from the cold Minnesota winter with Mugs, his dog, glued to his side. Mumbling hellos, he rubbed his hands together over the hot, pot-bellied woodstove in the kitchen. He touched my neck before they were even remotely warm, eliciting a shriek from me. Sitting down, he carefully took off his muddy farm boots so he wouldn't dirty up Grandma's floor. His coat came off next revealing the farmer's overalls he always wore. The pin-striped jean material covered his big belly; the dull brass buckles were always straining to keep the overalls from falling off his short, round frame. Stocking-footed he unhurridly made his way to the living room. Mugs and I followed behind, anxiously waiting for him to sit in his black leather recliner so we could join him. With one hand he held me in his lap and with the other he gently stroked Mugs' coarse, black curly fur.

I remember him reading the Bible for family devotions. Every night after dinner, he opened the drawer behind the kitchen table and pulled out the

black large print King James Bible. His wrinkled hands opened the Bible and carefully turned the worn pages until he found the place where he had finished reading the night before. While he read with his deep gravelly voice, the toothpick sandwiched in the corner of his little wrinkled pair of lips bobbed up and down.

I remember him working in the garage, one hand gloved, the other braving the cold biting air in order to putty the windows. In his gloved hand he held the little putty knife that he was using to scrape large globs of gray-white putty out of the can resting on the glass storm window. His naked white fingers picked up the glob of putty and smoothed it between the window's frame and glass, the putty rolling and shaping under his adept square-ended fingers. He dipped his fingers in a glass of water and slid them over the putty, making the lines neat and smooth.

I don't want to remember the way his sturdy red-peppered hands rested peacefully on his stomach. I don't want to remember how the white of his hands was somehow different from the white of before. I don't want to remember how they laid on his suit so empty of life. I don't want to remember. . . .

I miss my Grandpa's hands.



## Woman in the Window

The fire red lips  
shone with perfection  
and the painted eyes  
that would not smudge.  
She stood erect and tall,  
with pride,  
the gray wool skirt  
perfectly matched  
the crimson and gray blouse.  
On her shoulder  
hung a gray purse,  
inside—  
a checkbook  
surplus of cash,  
solid gold key chain,  
a tube of lipstick.  
She stepped into the air.  
The photo in the newspaper  
was unflattering.

Amy Pals

## Motionless

a playground swing,  
sways ever so slightly  
inviting me to sit a while.

I look at my arm,  
bare from my sleeveless shirt.  
I don't feel a breeze,

Above me  
pale yellow leaves tremble  
from the light breeze.

Around me  
the day is still.  
Leaves on the ground lie motionless.

I sit too  
waiting for the wind to move me.

Brenda Vos

## Suspension

Your stalactite anger  
Builds  
Slowly, silently

Becoming a venomous  
Fang.

Barbara Turnwall



## Haiku

Colors of summer  
die under the setting sun  
leaving blue-black wind.

Maya Gravatt

## The Weight of Night

The blackness ends at the edge  
of the hill where a warm harvest  
moon rides on the cold night  
sky. So stand out past the lights

let the dark breeze blow  
against your back. Dare  
yourself to look  
up. Gasp the heavens, star  
saturation presses you  
down. Run,

fly, gravel flipped under  
your feet. Make your own hurricane  
through hair as you race away.  
Away from the night.

Kevin James Bullis

## Resurrection

new  
moon  
rising  
and  
i  
run  
i  
run.

jennie johnson



## Revealed

Like brunettes dyed blonde,  
In the wind wheat fields  
Can't hide the rich brown  
Scalp of the earth.

jennie johnson

## Stand

Silence is a deceiver.  
It only hides the scars.  
Release your quivering emotions  
Harnesses deep inside.  
Tremble, child, tremble.  
Cradle the vault and ride.  
Stand up for yourself;  
Brave the quake;  
Reap the calm;  
And live.

jennie johnson

## Wind Blows

Grass waves to sky.  
Whispered laughter falls from  
teased leaves.  
Jealous dirt rides air.  
Clouds cry to settle dust.  
Wind blows land dry,  
And plays again.

jennie johnson

## Winter Wind

Wind knocks at the window  
and runs away,  
Leaving a low, cool whisper  
to dance with the curtain.

jennie johnson



# When Mom Worked on Saturdays

Scott Isebrand

It was another Saturday. I was very young, probably second grade, maybe first. I was nervous. Very nervous. Tense with a kind of agony that I now stand convinced no child should be gripped with. But I was gripped by it at about 10:30 in the morning, every Saturday that Mom worked at the hospital, when I was home alone and Dad would be coming home around noon and would need something to eat.

My stomach got tight. My hands felt funny—kind of like they were asleep. It is, of course, natural when you are nervous. The blood rushes out of the extremities and fills your gut, readying you for action. And, I imagine, my adrenaline flowed.

Then Dad came home.

I guess I should have called Mom at the hospital for a bit of a pep-talk, like I did on most Saturdays when she worked.

"Hi," she'd say, "how's my boy?"

"Fine."

"What are you doing?"

"Watching cartoons."

"Oh. Did you have some breakfast?"

"Yeah."

Then a pause. Then I would say, "I hope Dad will be all right when he gets home."

"Oh. I think he will be."

Those words were so comforting. I always loved to hear them.

But this Saturday I did not call Mom. When I didn't it was usually all right.

As the late-morning cartoons drifted into less interesting programming—sports and stuff—as it neared noon, I was afraid to go upstairs. I wanted Dad to come home, shut the door that went into the garage, and proclaim in a voice that was okay, "Hello!"

I'd run up from the basement, "Hi, Dad."

"How are you?"

"Fine." Too nervous to ask him if he needed something to eat. And then Mom would suddenly walk in behind him, having gotten off from work a bit early. Then all would be all right.

But that seldom happened. So I hoped he would come home—just him, not Mom—and say, "Well, let's go to McDonald's." And we'd make it there.

And he'd eat. And he'd be fine. And we could go home. And I'd be relieved. And I could get away from him, hide in the basement with my Legos, and feel like I really wanted to be with him but just couldn't.

But this Saturday morning was turning out the bad way. It was noon. Then it was a quarter after. And still no Dad. I was getting worried. I probably prayed to Jesus—as I usually did on Saturday mornings.

Finally, I came up from the basement; I wouldn't be able to hide there when he finally got home, anyway. I went upstairs to wait for him. I may have put on that record I loved of Mickey Mouse and the Mouseketeers singing American patriotic songs in a very up-beat, showtune-ish way, with Donald Duck, barely able to be heard over the choir, squawking away my fears which always came back during the silence between songs. The songs played, and I marched around the room like always, pretending I was a Mouseketeer, or Gen. Andrew Jackson when they sang "The Battle of New Orleans."

Then Dad came home. It was past twelve-thirty.

Hearing Dad's truck then an instant later the garage door going up electronically, I pushed aside the thin, peach-orange-tan curtains framing the large picture window in our living room, and looked out. It was Dad in the rusty, orange, Chevy truck with a topper. I turned the record down in case it was too loud. Dad did not like it once when it was too loud, and I felt awful.

Maybe, just maybe, I had not needed to have felt awful, belittled, inadequate. Maybe I was just overly sensitive. Weird, even.

I decided to turn the record player off.

The truck was in the garage, the engine off. Dad got out, walked to the door. I was bouncing while I walked around the house—wanting to look as nonchalant as possible when he found me. I made my way through the kitchen. Then suddenly I stopped. I decided to set a place setting for him. I usually did when Mom worked on Saturdays. I hastily set a plate then silverware, and

eventually I had to get up on the counter and seize the tall yellow plastic cup with Isebrand on the bottom in permanent marker. I placed the cup; then he was at the walk-in door—the door connecting our utility room off the kitchen to the huge two-car garage that smelled like gasoline and freshly-cut grass during the summer. Now, however, I think it was almost Fall. Cooler outside. Dad came in whistling (good sign). The truck engine was clicking, and the clicking echoing in the garage behind him.

He smiled. I think he's all right, but I'm not sure.

I would not dare to say he was late, or that I thought he needed to eat something—even before he went to the bathroom, which he always did as soon as he got home.

There was idle banter. I was scared. "I got the mail," pointing to it on the kitchen table.

"Oh, great." He took two long strides to the table, whistling. He whistled well. (I could too. But he whistled between his lips. I whistled between my teeth.)

He looked through the mail. Then again. Then set it down.

And just stood there. Just stood there with either a silly grin or a look of angry contemplation with his brow all wrinkled. I'm not sure which, but both were tell-tale signs. I began to think he indeed wasn't all right. Then he started to arrange the mail in a pile. And just kept arranging it—lining up the corners. Straightening the magazines on top of each other as if he was trying to make a solid cube of mail. He wasn't all right.

"Do you need something to eat, Dad?"

"Yeah!" he exploded with unnatural vigor, with a weird toothy grin on his face, his glasses down on his nose where most people wouldn't let them sit and where he wouldn't if he were okay.

I was terrified.

He offered a suggestion, "Let's go to McDonald's."

Then, for just a second he must have seemed all right, or else he was out the door to the truck before I could react. Or maybe I was too scared to react. If I tried to call Mom and tell her she needed to come home to feed Dad, he might have become angry, or just





disappointed—which was worse.

"Great," I said, "I'm hungry," I lied, hoping it would hurry him.

I hopped into the truck. Dad was slow starting it up. After getting in the truck he just sat there for a few seconds, then put the keys in, then just sat there. It was his blank stare. He wasn't all right.

I may have suggested that we eat at home—I should have if I didn't, but if I did he didn't like the idea.

Dad started the truck and we rolled out of the driveway, onto the street, and Dad drove towards downtown. Going through downtown was the long way to get to McDonald's. It was shorter going out onto the highway and around town to McDonald's. That way might have proved even more dangerous, though, since we would have encountered faster traffic.

I don't remember many of the specifics—just the terror, and the embarrassment. But Dad was driving, irregularly, through downtown, and having an insulin reaction. I didn't understand, and still do not understand, the finer workings of diabetes, but I knew Dad needed something to eat. Preferably sugar. I was angry, too. Why shouldn't I be. Regularly, all too regularly, Dad came home from work

on the very edge of a reaction—acting just a little too slow, looking just a little too distant, saying things that were just a little too off-the-wall, almost like he was drunk, and then having to be convinced to eat. Mom, of course, could convince him. I could not until I got older.

Then he'd eat, and afterward not remember anything that had happened. And he'd never apologize. I always thought he should. He should have apologized for not being more careful before he left work, not being sensitive enough to his body's signals, for he should have been able to sense he needed something to eat—at least once in a while—and then eaten one of the Snickers bars Mom always gave him as he left for work.

So he drove on. My heart pounded as we took wrong turns, stopped at green lights for no reason causing a flurry of angry horns to rise up from motorists behind us. Oh, if they could only know, only help, but I was trapped. It was getting later, Dad was getting worse. He wasn't making sense—I remember that. I can't remember everything he said, but it was all very wrong. Comments about things unseen by me, noises with his mouth, loud exclamations about nothings—not

unlike a reading of *Jabberwocky* by a drunk man with his editorializing and sound effects occasionally thrown in. I let myself cry once. Dad asked what was the matter. I said nothing.

We never made it to McDonald's. Dad took several wrong turns and ended up lost in our hometown, Algona, Iowa, population 6,000. No one gets lost in Algona. Dad pulled into somebody's driveway, stopped the truck and got out. I did too. I didn't know what to say, but I know I was now demanding, "Dad, you need something to eat."

A sort of ironic, sad chuckle would occasionally come out of his mouth, and he would say, "Oh, boy," a lot. When I grew desperate in his inactivity, or when my demand that we go to McDonald's would elicit no response, I would just shout out, "Dad!" then plead, "Dad?" And he might answer, "What!" in a silly, drunken, laughing, insane way—not in anger, but in irrationality.

He leaned against the hood for the longest time. Once again, I considered rushing into one of the houses near-by and phoning Mom, or saying, "Help me! My Dad is outside and needs something to eat," and escorting some stranger armed with sugar-laced orange



juice (Mom's choice weapon) and cookies out to my Dad.

Finally suggested it. Knowing what I was saying wasn't being comprehended—except for every once in a while when a comment would streak through the growing folds of stupor and hit his brain—I said, “Dad, I’m going inside here and calling Mom. Don’t go anywhere.”

He rushed at me.

He’d never been violent before, but I knew he could be . . . potentially. He picked me up. Hard. But just looked at me. He had that stupid grin on his face. His face was red, flushed, but not with anger. He asked me if I loved Jesus. I did. I counted on Him often. Dad had become a Christian, after I had, but of course in a more adult manner, a year or so before. I said yes. I said, of course, yes. I wanted the nightmare to be over. I almost let myself cry again, just a whimper came out. Ready to run away, into a house, call Mom, leave him, call the police and let them take him, or hope he ran after me menacingly so I could get a neighbor to hit him, or shoot him—with just cause.

He put me down. The neighborhood was very quiet. The street was dark and narrow. The driveways were mostly gravel and occupied by rusty cars. It was a poorer section of town. Finally, he got in the truck.

At some point during our subsequent wanderings, I suggested we stop at Kentucky Fried Chicken. It took some convincing, but he said it sounded good, and just kept saying that over and over and over and over: “That sounds good. That sounds good. That sounds gooo-ooooo-ah-dah!”

We walked up to the door at the busy KFC. He just stood at the door. “I can’t open it,” he said. I opened it, looking at him disapprovingly—I know I did. I was mad at him, at the situation. I was a second grader, and I was as mad.

I marched up to the counter. Waited for a lady to finish ordering ahead of me. I shot her impatient glances. Dad

just stood there, not saying anything, thank God. Finally the high schooler behind the counter asked, “Can I help you?” and looked at Dad.

Dad tried to order. I don’t remember what he said, but I remember suggesting what he should order when he was faltering all over the place and the high schooler was looking confused and I was embarrassed. Dad echoed my suggestions and would add, “Yeah, that does sound good.”

It came time to pay for our meals. He opened his billfold, and held it in one hand, as he pulled change out of his pocket with his other hand. He could not figure out what to do. He kept looking at the glowing red price display on the register, then looking at the money. He laughed, at himself, with a kind of frustrated laugh. I stood on my toes, grabbed a twenty out of his billfold and gave it to the high school girl. She gave Dad the change. It was the first time I engaged in a business transaction, initiated by myself. I grabbed the twenty because I knew it would be enough, and it was, and I knew it would get us one step closer to home, and it did. I felt pride days afterwards.

We got in the truck with our food. Dad sat there looking for his keys which were right next to him on the seat in plain view. “They’re right there, Dad.” “Oh.”

He started the truck. We were in a familiar part of town, a mile from our house at most. He took a fairly direct route toward home. Then a block away he turned too soon. We went way out, past Alan Benkendorf’s house, past the Lutheran church, then around past my elementary school, but finally into our driveway. Dad stopped there.

“I want to go in!” I pleaded.

He opened the garage door, looking a bit perturbed, and surged the truck forward after I prodded him to. He stopped the truck only half-way into the garage and just kept saying, “Something’s not right here. Somethin’s screwy, here.” He shut off the engine,

and I bolted out of the truck and ran into the kitchen and called Mom. I left Dad out there, not caring if he lowered the garage door and sliced the truck in two.

I know I didn’t use the phone in the kitchen, but the one downstairs.

“Kossuth County Hospital,” the lady at the switchboard said.

I let my voice crack, my throat was sore from trying not to cry, “I need to talk to Jane Isebrand. Please.” Usually, my speech was phrased like any one who called the hospital. I usually said, “May I speak to the laboratory, please.” Then I would be transferred, and the laboratory phone would ring, and if Mom didn’t answer, someone I knew would, and then I would ask for Mom. This time I just asked for Mom.

“One moment, please,” came the reply. I had tried to make my demand a bit insistent, without saying it was an emergency.

I don’t know what I said to Mom, but I think she told me she couldn’t get off. I was stunned. Her staying at work was *not* an option!

But some how I convinced her.

As I hung up the phone I heard Dad start up the truck.

I ran upstairs and out into the garage. He had backed out, left the garage door open, and then parked the truck on the side of the street. He pointed to the garage opening saying, “Something wasn’t right there.”

“Come in and eat.”

He came in the house. He wandered I think. I eyed him warily, wanting to run downstairs, and growing impatient for Mom’s arrival. Finally, Mom made it home.

She entered the house slowly—no panic; but her face looked worried. I may have hugged her. Mom fixed Dad things to eat. I hid downstairs, with the TV on, my Legos spread out across the floor, as Mom coaxed Dad into eating and watched him, and probably talked to him about what had happened, then went back to work. I stayed downstairs most of the day.



## Grace

the sky yields its white harvest.  
blending jagged clouds in mid-flight,  
spreading one vast shade of evenness  
covering rusty stretches of barbed wire  
with its level kernels.  
crowning fence posts, until ripe, overflowing,  
it falls to the ground.

the season looses itself—abundantly.  
like the arm of a combine spills gold.  
not withholding from those who call on it.  
but dispensing to all  
its virgin grains.

Maya Gravatt

## Octobering

In the air crows RAH! Ah! Ah!  
For yellow leaves  
Scuttling over sidewalks  
Like a great flood of little people  
Rushing mindlessly—  
Onto the street and into traffic!  
Then a breathed breeze like  
The exhale of an elderly  
Summer—filled with cold,  
Smelling of dry smoke.  
Then a breeze blows the crows  
Suddenly away (RAH! ah-AH!).  
And the next wind moves into place  
Grey clouds early in the day.  
The trees rattle a thin rustling roar  
Of complaint.  
And the crows peek out, head  
cockedly  
From shelters, at the sight.

Scott Isebrand

## Truth of the matter

Did you know,  
that not every road is straight?  
Not every sunset is beautiful.  
Peek  
please,  
through your slightly split eyes.  
And look at the  
dandelions  
growing between garbage cans,  
the broken plate glass window, the  
aimless lives like yours.  
See the walking wounded  
help them stand.  
Look through their eyes.  
Wash their face,  
then wash your own.

David J. Gibbs



## Quintessence

Blue-black  
sky surrounded,  
enveloped us into  
its silence as we tumbled  
out into the wilderness of  
achromatic flakes.

Illuminated by the warmth  
of the street lamps above, we  
were cleansed in a rectitude seldom  
seen by man.

An exhibition of omnipotence  
unfolded before my eyes.  
Some have termed it a fortunate accident.

I shake my head softly,  
knowing I saw angels descend  
the night I watched you capturing  
snowflakes on your tongue.

Joy Sterner

## Temporal Stardom

A chorusline of snowflakes  
whirling and twirling in an  
out of step kickline  
dance drunkenly in the  
streetlamp's spotlight,  
reeling, spinning—then, as  
the wind's humming  
overture fades, bowing from  
their backlit stage  
to huddle and pile,  
forfeiting their stardom for  
anonymity on the silent  
crystal stagefloor.

Carla Hibma



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*At Peace*

*Leave the air uncluttered  
by words.*

*Most will say all they can,  
in attempts to smooth-over  
lost-life.*

*But I say leave—  
leave what you have already said  
to speak now. in voices  
of greetings and departures.*

Maya Gravatt

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## Quintessence

Blue-tinted  
the air was thin,  
enveloped in mist  
its surface as we travelled  
out into the wilderness of  
schismatic fiction.

Flashed by the warmth  
of the stark lines above the  
dark, draped in a velvet of  
softly lit rain.

An exhibition of repugnance  
unfaded before my eyes.  
Some have turned it a profound accident.

I think my heart is still  
aching, I saw secrets beneath  
the mist I watched you gathering  
underneath the moonlight.

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